

# Gender Identities and Nation-Building in Norway: Men and Women at the University of Christiania (1813-1894)

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## ABSTRACT

This contribution sets out to study the links between gender roles and the nation-building process within one particular social group: the academic elite, especially students, in 19th-century Norway. Founded in 1811, the University of Christiania (nowadays Oslo) was the nursery of the Norwegian social and political elite during most of that century: it played a central role in defining elite gender norms and was also a major stage for the nation-building process. In this perspective we can study certain aspects of student sociability to probe the complex relationship between these two dynamics. In order to show the interaction of these processes, the first part depicts the influence of the national paradigm on the forging of specific masculine student sociability in the 1820-1830s, a period known as the beginning of the national romantic age. A second part then analyses the situation in the 1880s-1890s and the advent of female students in the academic elite: this was another critical moment in building the nation. The appearance of a gender factor within the university was connected with the promotion of a new national project, based upon rejection of romanticism and creation of a more democratic political order.

*Fondée en 1811 et établie en 1813, l'Université de Christiania (Oslo) a été la première institution «nationale» d'une Norvège sur la voie de l'émancipation politique. Véritable pépinière de l'élite sociale et politique pendant la majeure partie du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, elle a donc joué un rôle central, tant en ce qui concerne le processus de construction nationale que dans la définition des normes régissant les rapports hommes/femmes au sein de cette élite. Ainsi, l'étude de certains aspects de la sociabilité étudiante permet d'interroger la relation complexe entre ces deux dynamiques identitaires. De quelle manière le corps étudiant, exclusivement masculin jusqu'à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, devient-il un espace de représentation pour la nation norvégienne? Dans quelle mesure cette fonction est-elle liée à la promotion d'un idéal masculin spécifique? Comment est vécue l'irruption féminine de 1882, et quels changements induit-elle dans cette fonction de représentation du corps étudiant, ainsi que dans le processus plus large de la construction nationale? Sur la base d'une description succincte de la position privilégiée de l'élite académique entre 1813 et 1870, on étudiera en particulier l'incidence du fait national dans la forge d'une sociabilité étudiante, ainsi que le tribut de la Société Norvégienne des étudiants dans les débats identitaires des années 1820-1830. En effet, la vie académique de l'ère romantique se caractérise par l'exclusion des femmes et par la construction, la stigmatisation ou la confrontation de modèles masculins divergents. Plus spécifiquement, l'article propose de considérer la polémique littéraire opposant Welhaven à Wergeland sous un angle nouveau, comme un duel symbolique entre deux idéaux de masculinité, érigés en représentations rivales de la nation norvégienne. Dans une seconde partie, on*

*évoquera la situation singulière de ces jeunes étudiantes des années 1880, à la fois pionnières et marginales, souvent porte-drapeaux de la cause féministe, et qui se situent en rupture avec les représentations dominantes de rapports sociaux de sexe à la fin du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle. À cet égard, leur intégration dans la sphère universitaire constitue inévitablement un autre moment critique de la construction nationale norvégienne par rapport à la période romantique.*

## GENDER AND NATION IN NORWEGIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Women's history and nation-building history are traditionally two well-established trends of Norwegian historiography. For centuries citizens of a small dependent nation, Norwegian people have eagerly solicited historical studies looking into how their nation was constructed<sup>1</sup>. Women's history is a newer field within the national historiography: its breakthrough was partly the result of a reaction against long-standing domination by national history. With the development of gender studies, it became a genuine international and interdisciplinary field within the Norwegian academic milieu. However, gender and national identities were seldom used as analytical tools in comparative studies until 1993<sup>2</sup>. That year, Ida Blom surprised her Norwegian colleagues when she held a conference about defence politics and gender perspectives in the shadow of the Swedish-Norwegian Union collapse of 1905. Her contribution can be considered as a first step towards integration of two identity problems within one and the same field of study. Ida Blom showed that women had been at least as active as men in the fight for Norwegian independence, and that this involvement had been ignored hitherto. Since then, several studies have investigated gender and national identities as interacting factors potentially explaining social and political hierarchies<sup>3</sup>. The main problem is to define how gender identity influenced the forging of a national identity and/or class identity, and vice-versa<sup>4</sup>. In this perspective, the present chapter aims to show how gendered identities constantly interacted with the construction of a modern Norwegian self.

## THE ACADEMIC ELITE AND NATION BUILDING IN THE 19TH CENTURY

For many Norwegian artists the age of National Romanticism in the 19th century was a time of commitment to a quest for national symbols. The painter Peter Nicolai Arbo found his source of inspiration in Norse mythology, especially the figure of the *Valkyrie*<sup>5</sup>. But this image failed to become a specific representation for the Norwegian nation: Norse mythology was common ground for most Germanic countries.

However, the Valkyrie allegory would also be evoked as a symbol of Scandinavian women and the early feminist movements in Northern Europe. In 1915, Katharine Anthony referred to a "Valkyrie vote" to describe women's claims to suffrage<sup>6</sup>. Developing the allegory further, she noted that in spite of their nobility, the Valkyries were servants of a male master, the one-eyed lawmaker Odin, "a perfect analogy for the masculine State" and patriarchy<sup>7</sup>. Thus, this metaphor seems appropriate to portray a genuine Scandinavian paradox, which can provide a rich ground for comparison with other peripheral regions. On the one hand, the Scandinavian nations are European peripheries; they were mainly rural societies, and were consequently characterised by the long-standing dominance of traditional authorities. In the Norwegian case, these elements were strengthened by economic backwardness and the problem of nation-building. On the other hand, Scandinavia experienced a surprising convergence of various trends at the end of the 19th century: urbanisation, industrialisation, democratisation and secularisation. The growth of feminist movements was one facet of this Modern breakthrough. Moreover, the feminist issue became a recurrent theme in Scandinavian literature and contributed to the creation of an unusual stereotype: these nations were envisaged as feminist nations<sup>8</sup>.

But besides the importance of gendered self-representation in the nation-building process, we need to understand how such a construction was formed. After centuries of Danish rule and absolutism, the University was a central arena of nation-state construction between 1814 and 1869. It was mainly a recruiting institution for state officials, who were urgently needed to ensure the solidity of the new-born State. The academic elite also played a decisive role in forging a national identity, with the vogue for romantic nationalism between 1830 and 1867. One can easily depict 19th-century Norwegian society as an *academocracy*<sup>9</sup>. The male students were educated with a special focus on their future responsibilities towards the newly-emancipated state. The academic sphere was a small one, mainly clustering in the capital city, closely linked to the state and emerging bureaucracy, as well as characterized by a strong *esprit de corps*. As there was no aristocracy, “academic citizens”<sup>10</sup> were in a better position than any other group to represent the young nation’s pride. Curiously, though academic sociability was exclusively a masculine domain until the end of the 19th century, the study of masculinity in the academic milieu has been seriously deserted by most of the historians of education in this present period. Hence the following section sets out to highlight various features of student masculinity and their role in forging the national self-representation.

### THE NORWEGIAN STUDENTS’ SOCIETY (DNS) AND THE “ROMANTIC” NATION 1813-1834

The DNS was founded in October 1813 by 17 of the first 18 students who registered in the new university. Its statutes have always expressed the aim of the DNS as “the elevation of intellectual culture and brotherly spirit among its members, by means of scientific and recreational activities”<sup>11</sup>. A male comradeship club for young students, providing intellectual nourishment for its members, was seen as a supplement to the education given at university. But its aim was not purely intellectual. The promotion of brotherly fellowship appeared to be a moral necessity for a group which was meant to take over most of the leading positions in society.

Thus the DNS could be seen as a medium of social control over young students: student years are often described as a time of freedom, immoderation and carelessness, and a student can be universally defined as a young person who gets the chance to escape from family authority. This psychological feature obviously played a role in the forging of a student identity. In this context, the DNS might appear as an arena where brotherhood between equal men replaced the paternal hierarchies. Student culture was a male culture, and as a convivial organisation, the DNS provided a solid frame for liberal and adult masculinity, based on equality. The student club was an efficient substitute for a potentially threatening estrangement from the father.

Such a perspective underscores the importance of national symbolism: the “fatherland” may be used as a symbolic representation of the father. Indeed, nation meant responsibility, which was itself a major virtue of the elite’s masculinity<sup>12</sup>. As early as November 1813, some students claimed that a student uniform would be a better way to foster group spirit among the DNS: this uniform seemed to have been inspired by the black uniforms of the Lützow Free corps founded in 1813 by German academics who participated in the campaign against Napoleon. The Norwegian students had a gold and black cockade on their bicorn hat, as a symbol of their allegiance to the Norwegian nation. The Norwegian cockade can be set at the crossroads of two historical legacies. It had been widely used by French patriots during the Revolution after 1792. The symbolism of the colours is more obscure, though one cannot help seeing that the German *Burschenschaft*, founded in 1815, used these same two colours which, with red, became symbols for German nationalism. The Norwegian student uniform was authorized by the Swedish king in 1820<sup>13</sup>. Although it did not become compulsory among students, it clearly showed that the ones who wore it had a claim to represent their nation.

Male students' role in the genesis of a national symbolism was an important feature in the literary debates of the 1830s. Two DNS members, Johan Sebastian Welhaven and Henrik Wergeland, were regarded by their fellows as the most gifted Norwegian poets of their time. Inspired by the National Romantic Movement, both considered that their highest duty was to help create a genuine Norwegian culture, but they did so upon different premises. Two student factions crystallised around the poets. For Wergeland and his followers (the Patriots), the building of a Norwegian culture was dependent on breaking with the traditionally strong Danish influence. On the other hand, Welhaven and his friends (the *Intelligenz* or *Danomanes*) were convinced that the Norwegian educated elite had to use the literary models forged in Denmark, given that this land had always been a cultural bridge between continental Europe and Scandinavia: if Norway wanted to follow "the stream of civilization" and develop the finest features of its national personality, it had to be open towards the outer world.

Deep-seated enmity between these proud students worsened the philosophical divergence between the two factions. Wergeland was an extroverted, spontaneous, impetuous man, as well as a nationalist with apparent democratic convictions. He also benefited from a relatively comfortable economic situation, as opposed to Welhaven. This latter was most certainly a brilliant orator, known for his looks, but he was introverted, touchy, and the arrogance he was accused of was a mask for the social shame caused by his own poverty<sup>14</sup>. Besides this personal conflict, there was a contrast between two conceptions of the nation, reflected in the personality of the two protagonists, as well as a moral conflict hinging on the nature of student sociability. Welhaven wanted to civilise the Norwegian nation in the same way as he wanted to contribute to moralising student and academic sociability, while Wergeland and his companions were known for their festive excesses: but could the DNS contribute to student fellowship and academic excellence at the same time, given that the former did not necessarily entail literary occupations, but more or less coarse entertainment, like drinking and gambling?<sup>15</sup>

Concerning their own poetic production, the debate was substantially the same. In July 1830 Henrik Wergeland published an epic mystical poem entitled *Creation, Man and the Messiah*. One month later, Welhaven published a satirical poem on this bizarre work: he revolted against Wergeland's lyricism and exuberance, a source of chaos, madness and wildness, and an open breach of taste according to classical tradition<sup>16</sup>. In 1831 the controversy deepened into a long-lasting literary joust between the two factions of the DNS. This dispute, one of the fiercest in Norwegian literary history, has been called the *Stumpefeide* [battle of pieces]. Under the cover of pen names, personal jibes were used as frequently as were literary arguments, in order to weaken the enemy, and *Siful Siffada*, alias Wergeland, denounced not only the affectation and 'Danomania' of his rival's pen, but also his cowardice, jealousy, snobbery and hypocrisy.

The quarrel burst in 1829 around the 17th of May celebration. Until that year, the celebration of Constitution Day had been limited to the private sphere in Christiania. For the Swedish king Karl-Johan, a public celebration would have been seen as an act of mistrust toward his House, for it was also the day when the Danish prince Christian-Fredrik received the Crown of Norway as an independent State; the Swedish Bernadotte, on the other hand, wanted to commemorate the Act of Union between Norway and Sweden. A ban was therefore pronounced on the Norwegian national celebration in 1827.

In spite of this atmosphere, the first DNS meeting of 1829 adopted a resolution that turned the 17th of May into an official academic celebration. Though many professors and some students (Welhaven among them) were against this decision, they did not manage to revoke it. By contrast, Wergeland wore his student uniform and was considered as the main leader when a national dem-

onstration was staged in the heart of the city: this demonstration was finally dispersed by the cavalry at the end of the day, but it undoubtedly gave Wergeland and the DNS prestige as the symbol of a proud Norwegian nation. As a result the loyalists were isolated within the DNS: Welhaven was not really interested in political issues and conformed to DNS ideals, which meant a tendency to give his attention to aesthetical matters<sup>17</sup>; he did not participate in festivities, and kept a low profile during this *Torvslaget* [Market Place battle].

One can say that the conflict between Wergeland and Welhaven was a complex mix of individual frustrations and personal rivalries within the DNS, major philosophical differences and diverging orientations about the future of Norway as a nation. To what extent can this conflict be interpreted as a tension between rival conceptions of masculinity, erected into a representation of the fatherland? Some answers can be found in the literary joust of 1831-1832: the *Stumpefeide* consisted in the publication of short satirical epigrams in the DNS journal, conveying more or less nasty thoughts. Welhaven was accused of being “a micro Don Quixote, a Harlequin”, a puppet, an unachieved and childish genius. The Patriots made fun of the theology student’s small literary output: he “made one rhyme for Christmas and thought himself Apollo’s cousin ...”<sup>18</sup>. They also mocked Welhaven’s so-called pretentious style, and his ‘Danomania’ was turned into a fraud, a desire to steal other authors’ works.

What about Wergeland? Welhaven described his rival thus: “Monsieur Siful Siffada [Wergeland] has generously honoured our society with much of his heavy drinking, which he very specifically named ‘pieces’ [*stumper*] but most of it is spiced with disgusting ingredients, so as to hide the cruel lack of salt ...”<sup>19</sup>. Crudeness, exuberance and chaos were also seen as a reflection of Wergeland’s personality. The Norwegian students were not allowed to fight each other physically, like German students. In this context, the *Stumpefeide* could be interpreted as a symbolic duel, used as a medium for resolving conflicts. The identification between authors and their writings was permanent: if his poems were wild, so was Wergeland and his vision of Norway; if some poems were built upon foreign literary patterns, Welhaven and his friends were then traitors to the nation.

Several remarks can be made. Firstly, it is tempting to associate each author with an ideal type of gender. Wergeland may have been a more masculine Norwegian than Welhaven: he liked to drink with his friends, he was coarser, more direct, more committed to public life and the political problems of his time. Conversely, Welhaven might seem more feminine: his interest in aesthetics and classicism, his scorn for student vulgarity and his relative indifference to politics, as well as his inclination for musical evenings outside the DNS<sup>20</sup>, had something in common with elite female tastes and socializing. Nonetheless, there is absolutely no indication that such an argument was used to humiliate Welhaven: gender identities in the romantic age should definitely not be interpreted according to contemporary standards. More pertinently, the *Stumpefeide* is a conflict between two rival ideals of masculinity combined with antagonistic national cultures<sup>21</sup>. Both Welhaven and Wergeland were theology students. But Welhaven’s masculinity seemed to have been more largely influenced by a Christian conception of masculinity as self-control, which meant an ideal masculinity based on the need for restraining passions, for temperance, perseverance and all the virtues required to forge a responsible adult and a righteous Christian. From a European perspective, this moral aspect was actually a general concern of the 19th-century middle classes: a typical historical example was the Catholic religious communities, where the idea of temperance was heightened by the requirement of male chastity<sup>22</sup>. Wergeland’s masculinity was more typical of a student. Freedom, passions and occasional excesses were not excluded, and were even tolerated, in the sense that cheerfulness was a highly-praised quality for male sociability: drinking punches (but not aquavit), smoking and joking with one’s fellow men were almost compulsory activities.

Secondly, we must bear in mind the importance of a literary controversy in Norway in the 1830s: the young nation had an official written language, but it was not really different from the Danish language. To many academics including Welhaven, this written language was the only valuable one, but others like Wergeland aimed to *Norwegianise* it in order to make it more similar to the oral and popular dialects. Thus, the crudeness the latter was accused of was partly the result of unusual employment of oral dialects or expressions in his poems<sup>23</sup>. This literary commitment cannot be reduced to an artistic fad: it had strong symbolic implications for the definition of authentic *Norwegianness*. According to Welhaven, “Henrik Wergeland’s conception led “straight to the wildest barbarism and from there to a perversion that may threaten the social order”<sup>24</sup>. In other words, the quarrel evolved around three stages: personal rivalry, literary polemics and political conflict over the genuineness of Norwegian identity. Wergeland’s impetuosity was seen by Welhaven as a cultural threat to the shared foundations of Danish and Norwegian civilization: Harmony and Reason were essential patterns in Welhaven’s masculinity, artistic thinking and political views. His personal position tended to the establishment of a symbolic frontier between civilization and savagery, which he found in the linguistic and literary differences between him and Wergeland, as well as in their respective behaviour. In 1832 a group of students had visited a whore-house and painted one of their sleeping drunk fellows black “in an indecent way”. Nevertheless, the DNS did not think fit to expel these students<sup>25</sup>. Welhaven and his friends would eventually decide to leave the DNS and set up a more moral student association, after such an incident which showed the inability of the DNS to promote the civilised sociability they desired. As for the literary joust, which was at first limited to private circles in the student fellowship, it was eventually published some months afterwards<sup>26</sup>, and became a burning national issue until the end of the 1830s<sup>27</sup>.

If Welhaven reached a certain level of respectability as an author in Denmark, Wergeland undoubtedly won the symbolic duel with his enemy in Norway: he became a national hero for the young nation. Nowadays in Oslo’s main parade street his statue seems to stare at the *Storting* (the National Parliament). And it is amusing to note that his literary and personal characteristics, forged into student mores (spontaneity, coarseness, democratic opinions, etc.) are still common stereotypes in Denmark and Sweden for depicting the Norwegian identity.

## THE DNS AND FEMALE STUDENTS 1880-1884: A STAGE FOR POLITICIZATION

In 1879, with the publication of his play *A Doll’s House*, Henrik Ibsen rapidly gained a wide international audience, and the numerous debates around his works greatly contributed to the creation of a Scandinavian feminist stereotype abroad: the traditional perception of social gender roles and relations began to be discussed in many European countries<sup>28</sup>. Nevertheless, throughout the 19th century, in Norway as elsewhere in Europe, a simplistic model of gender roles continued to rule social representations. This “ideology of domesticity” was constructed upon belief in an intrinsic difference between women and men, leading to a dividing up of social functions: the public sphere was a male domain, while women were mainly confined to the private sphere<sup>29</sup>. Although this model did not fit the course of social evolution in 19th-century Europe, it was widely relevant as a symbolic norm. Generally, the connection between motherhood and education is a widespread feature in human communities<sup>30</sup>. Women in the 19th century also had an important function in teaching, and the education of women was therefore an important concern<sup>31</sup>. Young well brought up girls ought to be educated according to religious and moral principles, in order to develop their virtue and make them “obedient wives, lovely daughters, honest friends, sensible ladies of the house, clever mothers and educators, models of righteousness, noble citizens of the State, supports and shelters for the poor, true Christians ...”<sup>32</sup>. For this reason, their education had

to focus on domestic duties, reading and writing “in a clear and pleasant way”. A good knowledge of the Bible was almost compulsory, while French, music, painting or drawing were highly recommended<sup>33</sup>. All these accomplishments were supposed to express the feminine virtues: modesty, sense, order as opposed to pride, vanity and coquetry. But they were also meant to provide women from the elite with knowledge they would eventually pass on to their children. In this traditional model, education was related to motherhood.

Before the 1860s some of these women tried to satisfy their desire for learning by private tuition, but they seldom had a chance to use their knowledge for the public good. Young girls’ secondary education was irregular in its course, institutionally divided from boys’ schools as well as fundamentally different in its contents. However, with the constant improvement in their legal position, women were increasingly hired as teachers in primary and secondary schools. This evolution not only suited the womanhood of the time; it also presented a significant financial advantage for the municipalities, since female teachers were not as expensive as their male peers: by 1880, women teachers formed the majority in most cities<sup>34</sup>. In one former Danish province sharing its king with Sweden, the “woman question” was partly conditioned by the evolution of women’s position in the other Scandinavian states. As early as 1873, women were given permission to take the entrance examinations for Swedish universities<sup>35</sup>. In 1875 a Danish woman applied for medicine studies at the University of Copenhagen, and urged the Danish government to let women take all academic examinations with the exception of theology<sup>36</sup>. This process in Denmark was curiously similar to what was about to happen in Norway in 1882.

Ida Cecilie Thoresen had applied to take the university *examen artium* [entrance examination] back in 1880, but her application was rejected on the grounds that this examination was a “maturity test for men”<sup>37</sup>. She had read John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869), as well as most of the Scandinavian radical writers and her appetite for knowledge made her determined to prepare the *examen artium*, with the support of a father who had acquaintances in the National Parliament. After its rejection by the Church and Education Department, the case was taken before the *Storting*. In spite of opposition from the Department and from influential members of the Academic College, the law for women’s access to the University was passed on the 15 June 1882<sup>38</sup>. In September 1882, Ida C. Thoresen became the first Norwegian female student<sup>39</sup>.

Without diminishing the long-term perspective of women’s legal emancipation, one cannot overlook the personal commitment of Ida C. Thoresen<sup>40</sup>. The law seems almost to have been passed for her alone to take the examination in time for the beginning of the new term. Women’s access to higher education was originally secured by one woman, and appeared to be a privilege, at least in early years. Between 1882 and 1886, only 15 women took the *examen artium*, representing only 0.9% of academic youth!<sup>41</sup> Certainly, their number began to increase rapidly, and the proportion of female students reached 17.3% in 1902-1906<sup>42</sup>. Nonetheless, they were a minority in a milieu that remained dominated by men.

Most of these young women came from the middle class: for the period 1882-1886 this was the case of 12 out of 15 female students<sup>43</sup>. Nearly all of them had fathers who were academics. The possibility of getting a secondary education was not given to all young girls: it depended on the family income. Moreover, Ida C. Thoresen had to prepare the *examen artium* in 1880 by private coaching in all subjects<sup>44</sup>.

Women students were few and far between because the secondary level was partly structured around exclusion of girls. Those who made the grade were often feminists and belonged to the social elite of the time. They were particularly talented compared to their male fellows<sup>45</sup>. Another chief difference from male students was the choice of faculty. In practice, History, Philosophy,

Mathematics and Natural Science were the only faculties willing to open their doors to women students between 1882 and 1884<sup>46</sup>. Most women chose to enter the last-named, which was then a fast-growing faculty, as well as a symbol of “modern” times.

These facts show that the first women students were pioneers in all senses of the term. Higher education for women was clearly a breach of social norms which were still heavily influenced by the ideal of domesticity: the transgression was evident, and the commitment of the first female academics showed a determination to undo the dominant gender norms. What is more, Norwegian female students often had a political motivation: their academic experience gave them a social responsibility to support the cause of women rights in Norway.

Nevertheless, we do find exceptions to this feminist pattern among the first women students. Many women did not accept the feminist commitment because of their religious convictions, age or social origin: even among the first female students, some preferred to accept the dominant social expectations of marriage and motherhood<sup>47</sup>. Marie Geelmuyden took the *examen artium* in 1883. She studied physics and chemistry, not out of scientific or professional ambitions, but because she thought it would be useful for teaching “domestic subjects” in girls’ school<sup>48</sup>. Another woman student who stood out against the feminist cause was Laura Römcke who in 1883 defined femininity as the lack of all the qualities which were socially appreciated. To her, women who wanted to play a role in the society must renounce their womanhood<sup>49</sup>. Quite strangely, this pessimistic view was used as an argument by the opponents of women’s rights. It clearly shows that feminists themselves were still influenced by the ideology of domesticity and did not always see scope for a genuine feminine identity outside the traditional frame.

But for the most committed women students, the DNS could certainly have been a most prominent stage, since from 1876 onwards the romantic student fellowship club was progressively becoming a public arena for political debate<sup>50</sup>. Legally, it should not have been a problem for women students to enter the student club, as its statutes established that it was opened to all academic Norwegian citizens. Yet things were not so simple. The 1880s were a time for growing politicization of the public sphere. The liberal majority in the *Storting* wanted to introduce a genuine parliamentary system, against the will of the Swedish king Oscar II. Political debate began to impassion the growing number of newspaper readers. The DNS was more and more contested by radical students, while the memory of an exclusive male student club, free of political passions, became a *leitmotiv* and a source of nostalgia for the more conservative academics. This serious identity crisis was brought to a head by the question of the status of female students.

In 1882 the DNS assembly decided to support the law concerning women’s access to university<sup>51</sup>. Then the question arose: should Ida C. Thoresen be allowed to enter the exclusive student club? A proposal to give to the first female academic a guest membership was debated, but only reached unanimity in February 1883<sup>52</sup>.

Ida C. Thoresen’s special status was interpreted according to differing political views: for most of the conservative students, her membership was an exceptional case, and should remain so; while the liberal and radical students believed it was the first step towards gender equality within academic society. In fact, her integration was nothing other than a compromise between two political factions. The young lady could hardly feel at home in a society which did not lose its male character<sup>53</sup>: for example, drinking was still an important part of student comradeship but could not be compatible with the ideal of decency which was a central feminine virtue<sup>54</sup>. That was probably the main reason why she committed herself to founding a private debating club called *Skuld*, together with five other young girls in November 1883<sup>55</sup>. All of them wanted to follow the tracks of Ida C. Thoresen and put themselves outside the traditional network of male student society. In this, the



female students were not only pioneers; they were also marginal within an academic order that worked according to other traditions.

Nevertheless, in autumn 1884 a discussion about feminism and women's rights was launched. Quoting the French novelist Balzac, the president of the DNS pointed out that "the problem of women's education is an important problem, because the future of our nation depends on mothers"<sup>56</sup>. He therefore proposed to grant access to the DNS to all women students. For the latter, the decision implied acquisition of the "right of public speech"<sup>57</sup>: discussing politics or social themes publicly was another breach of the ideology of domesticity<sup>58</sup>.

There was indeed a new political context from June 1884 onwards. King Oscar II definitively lost the battle against the *Storting* and had to appoint a parliamentary and liberal government. This political change was also significant for the feminists: by giving the Norwegian Parliament the last word in appointment of the government, against the will of a Swedish king, the new order supported Norwegian radicalization vis-à-vis Sweden. That same year the first modern political parties were founded, and one year later, Gina Krog founded the Norwegian Women's Suffrage Association (*Norsk kvinnestemmerettsforening*), which campaigned for women's suffrage on the same conditions as men<sup>59</sup>. This association would organise a petition to support the dissolution of the Union with Sweden in 1905: this first national participation gave a basis of legitimacy for gender-neutral citizenship, showing that women were able to be responsible and active citizens on behalf of the Norwegian nation. This is obviously a case where nationalism interacted with the claim for women's political rights. Between 1907 and 1913 nation-wide suffrage rights were progressively granted to women: eventually, Norway became the first European sovereign State to give women full citizenship<sup>60</sup>. The situation was quite different in Denmark and Sweden, as these two countries were old independent nations: the combination of feminism, democratization and nationalism was not as evident as in Norway. Danish women had to wait until 1915. In Sweden, the women's movement achieved a distinct form the same year as in Norway with the establishment of the Fredrika Bremer Association. But this association did not officially demand suffrage for women before 1899, in a context where universal suffrage for men was not effective before 1907. Swedish women obtained full citizenship in 1919. In other words, from 1884 on Norway witnessed a remarkable convergence between various brands of freedom: parliamentary rule, nationalism and feminism<sup>61</sup>.

## WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND NATIONALISM IN THE 1890s

The ideological and chronological conjunction between the promotion of a new gender order and the fight for national status was not uniquely Norwegian, as is shown in this volume by the example of English women serving the Italian unification. For the Norwegian case, let us consider the example of the most well-known feminist activist at the turn of the century.

Gina Krog did not have any academic degree, but had been in close touch with women students in *Skuld*. In 1894, against a backdrop of national radicalization between Norway and Sweden, this feminist activist published a book that summarized the level of Norwegian women's emancipation. Presented at the Universal Exhibition of Chicago in 1893, the work was obviously influenced by both nationalist and feminist views. Gina Krog not only pointed out the historical coincidence between two spheres of freedom<sup>62</sup>; she tried to show how Norwegian women had enjoyed a favourable position in medieval Norway, setting the modern feminist movement in the framework of an ancient Norwegian tradition: "Some reforms from the middle of our century seem to be a repetition of ancient national rules, and one gets the impression that by the laws of old Norwegian women were better considered than they were to be later under the Danish legal

system”<sup>63</sup>. This argument suggests that nationalist rhetoric was seen as a precursor of the feminist discourse. In the last decade of the 19th century, nationalism had such a strong aura that it became the most legitimating principle for political and social movements like feminism.

According to Krog, the main reason why the free Norwegian women from the Middle Ages had lost their advantageous legal position was Danish annexation and the rule of an absolute monarchy. Her historical investigation did not go further than a short overview of developments within the law: however, in a context of acute nationalism levelled against Sweden, the propagandist allusion was quite plain. Eventually, this argument most certainly contributed to the forging of a specific cause: women’s emancipation was a central dynamic in *the fight for the Norwegian soul*<sup>64</sup> at the turn of the 19th century.

The example of Norwegian student sociability shows that specific acceptances of masculinity and femininity were used to foster the nation-building project. In the 1830s, the Patriots’ pride inveighed against the Danish leanings and so-called civilization of the *Intelligenz*, considered as *unNorwegian*. Half a century later, the gradual feminization of the DNS and the influence of feminist ideology began to question women’s traditional social role within the nation. Participation in higher education led to women gaining the right to speak in public and promoted the idea that gender differences need not mean gender hierarchy. It also allowed some women to commit themselves to the struggle for Norwegian independence. As stressed by one of the first woman students in the 1890s, membership of the DNS “was essential to get an opportunity to vote about the pure flag and other burning issues ...”<sup>65</sup>. That may be the reason why the *Valkyrie* allegory was also used to describe the specific early quality of Northern Europe’s feminism.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> W. Hubbard, J.E. Myhre, T. Nordby, S. Sogner (eds.), *Making a historical culture: Historiography in Norway*, Oslo - Copenhagen - Stockholm - Boston 1995, p. 7.
- <sup>2</sup> I. Blom, *Gender and nation in international comparison*, in I. Blom, K. Hagemann, C. Hall, *Gendered nations. Nationalisms and gender order in the long nineteenth century*, Oxford - New York 2000, p. 3.
- <sup>3</sup> Id., *Det er forskjell på folk – nå som før: om kjønn og andre kriterier for sosial differensiering*, Oslo 1994, p. 207. This volume gathers together the most important articles about gender and national identities in Norway.
- <sup>4</sup> In her founding article on gender theory, J.W. Scott pointed at the need to refuse “the fixed and permanent quality of the binary opposition”, as well as the need for “a genuine historicization and deconstruction of the terms of sexual difference”, J.W. Scott, *Gender: a useful category of historical analysis*, in “The American Historical Review”, vol. 91, 5, December 1986, p. 1065.
- <sup>5</sup> Three main works show representations of Valkyries: *Åsgårdsreisen* (1872, Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo); *Valkyrie* (1865, National museum, Stockholm); *Valkyrie* (1869, Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo).
- <sup>6</sup> K. Anthony, *Feminism in Germany and Scandinavia*, New York 1915, p. 205.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.
- <sup>8</sup> Many Scandinavian authors deal with the “women question”, more or less directly. Henrik Ibsen was undoubtedly the most famous. In the 1890s his irruption onto the Parisian literary scene caused a fierce quarrel, showing that Scandinavian literature was regarded suspiciously on the continent. French critics generally considered it as an exotic and boring curiosity, impossible to understand for “Latin brains”, partly because of the alleged weirdness of Scandinavian women characters. Strangeness, introversion, darkness of mood but also stubbornness and determination consequently became common stereotypes about Scandinavian women, J. Lemaitre, *De l’influence récente des littératures du Nord*, in “Revue des Deux-Mondes”, 15 December 1894, pp. 847-872.
- <sup>9</sup> The neologism was created by the social historian Jan Eivind Myhre.
- <sup>10</sup> Private archives (PA) 1322, Ah 0001, *Studentersamfundets lover*, 1833, Riksarkivet (National Archives), Oslo. “Academic citizens” was a commonly used expression to describe all those who had taken the *examen artium*, which was the entrance examination for University: this expression refers to students, professors but also state officials, members of the government, and generally all who had once been at University.

- <sup>11</sup> Private Archives (PA) 1322, DNS, Série Ah 1001, *Lover*. "Det norske studentersamfundets formål er ved videnskabelige sysler og underholdende beskæftigelser at udbrede åndsdannelse og broderånd blandt sine medlemmer." Section 1, § 1, in *Love for DNS*, 1833, Riksarkivet (National Archives), Oslo.
- <sup>12</sup> D. Tjeder, *The Power of character. Middle-class masculinities 1800-1900*, Stockholm 2003, pp. 135-138.
- <sup>13</sup> F.B. Wallem, *Det Norske studentersamfund gennem hundrede aar*, Christiania 1916, pp. 35-38.
- <sup>14</sup> A.L. Seip, *Norges Dæmring: Johan Sebastian Welhaven og nasjonen*, Oslo 2007, p. 62.
- <sup>15</sup> One notes that most forms of gambling were forbidden by the DNS statutes, at least from 1833. Cards games were nonetheless allowed, but only on Thursday evenings and Sunday evenings. The reason was the "indignity" of such games, which seemed incompatible with the idea of responsibility. Breaking the rule was grounds for expulsion from the student society. In Private Archives PA 1322, DNS, Serie Ah 1001, *Lover*, Section 2, § 5, *Love for DNS*, 1833, Riksarkivet (National Archives), Oslo.
- <sup>16</sup> *Til Henrik Wergeland! Hvorlænge vil du rase mod fornuften?* [To Henrik Wergeland! How long will you be angry against Reason?] was the title of this satirical poem published in the newspaper "Morgenbladet", 15 August 1830. The same opinion was expressed in 1832, in a critical book *Henrik Wergelands Digtekunst og polemikk/ved Aktstykker oplyste af Johan S. Welhaven*, Christiania 1832.
- <sup>17</sup> Seip, *Norges Dæmring* cit., p. 61.
- <sup>18</sup> Wallem, *Det Norske studentersamfund gennem hundrede aar* cit., p. 155.
- <sup>19</sup> J.S. Welhaven, *Supplementer til Siful Siffadas stumper. Forord*, October 1831, in Id., *Henrik Wergelands Digtekunst og polemikk* cit., p. 87.
- <sup>20</sup> Seip, *Norges Dæmring* cit., p. 54.
- <sup>21</sup> We may evoke with D.M. Hadley "the plurality of masculinities", as well as the distinction between dominant masculinity and subordinate masculinity. *Introduction: Medieval Masculinities*, in D.M. Hadley (ed.), *Masculinity in medieval Europe*, London - New York 1999, pp. 4-10.
- <sup>22</sup> About religious masculinity in the same period, see the contribution by Thomas Buerman in this volume on 19th-century Belgian Zouaves in the Pontifical army.
- <sup>23</sup> P.A. Munch, *Om Norske Sprog reformation* (1832, Vidar), in *Samlede avhandlinger*, vol. 1, Christiania 1873, p. 22.
- <sup>24</sup> Welhaven, *Henrik Wergelands Digtekunst og polemikk* cit., p. 85.
- <sup>25</sup> Wallem, *Det Norske studentersamfund gennem hundrede aar* cit., pp. 165-168.
- <sup>26</sup> Welhaven's epigrams were published under the title *Tre Dosin Complimenter til Henrik Wergeland*, Trondheim 1832, p. 7, while Wergeland published his *Sifuliner til Studenten Jahn Welhaven med øvrige opbragte Compagnie af poetiske og æsthetiske Bagateller*, Trondheim 1832, p. 8. These handwritten publications contain most of the *Stumpefeide* epigrams.
- <sup>27</sup> E. Beyer (ed.), *Norges litteraturhistorie: fra Wergeland til Vinje*, Oslo 1974, p. 257.
- <sup>28</sup> See, for example, F. Reinecker, *La femme dans le théâtre d'Ibsen*, Paris 1912, p. 208.
- <sup>29</sup> R.G. Fuchs, V.E. Thompson, *Women in nineteenth century Europe*, New York 2005, p. 2.
- <sup>30</sup> In the present volume, Esther Sánchez Medina also shows that culture and education disconnected from motherhood could often subvert the traditional order based on a strict division of gender roles.
- <sup>31</sup> Fuchs, Thompson (eds.), *Women in nineteenth century Europe* cit., p. 84.
- <sup>32</sup> H.J. Birch, *Billedgallerie for Fruentimmer, indeholdende Levnetsbeskrivelser over berømte og lærde danske, norske og udenlandske Fruentimmere*, Copenhagen 1793, pp. 1-2.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-11.
- <sup>34</sup> K. Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norges historie. 1870-1905: Det moderne gjennombrudd*, Oslo 2005, pp. 43-44.
- <sup>35</sup> Anthony, *Feminism* cit., p. 30.
- <sup>36</sup> J. Steenstrup, *Den danske kvindes historie fra Holbergs tid til vor 1701-1917*, vol. 2, Copenhagen 1917, p. 166.
- <sup>37</sup> I. Blom, *Uden dog at overskride sin naturlige begrænsning. Kvinner i Akademia 1882-1932*, in L. Sangolt (ed.), *Minervas døtre: organisering av kvinnelige akademikere 1882-2005*, Bergen 2005, p. 82.
- <sup>38</sup> A.W. Brøgger, E. Jansen (eds.), *Norsk biografisk Leksikon*, Oslo 1938, vol. 8, p. 12.
- <sup>39</sup> Wallem, *Det Norske studentersamfund gennem hundrede aar* cit., p. 805.
- <sup>40</sup> Ida C. Thoresen was among those who founded the Norwegian feminist Association in 1884, and was chosen the same year as a member of the executive board. She was also an active member in the Association for the Women's

- vote between 1897 and 1902, in *Studenterne fra 1882: Biografiske meddelelser samlede i anledning af deres 25- aars Studentejubileum*, Christiania 1907, p. 2.
- <sup>41</sup> *Kvinnelige studenter 1882-1931: en statistisk oversikt – Tabel nr. 2*, in Norske Kvinnelige Akademikeres Landsforbund, *Kvinnelige studenter 1882-1932* cit., p. 13.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> *Kvinnelige studenter 1882-1931: en statistisk oversikt – Tabel nr. 8*, in *Kvinnelige studenter 1882-1932* cit., p. 20.
- <sup>44</sup> Ida Cecilie Krog, in *Studenterne fra 1882: Biografiske meddelelser samlede i anledning af deres 25- aars Studentejubileum* cit., p. 1.
- <sup>45</sup> The results of the *examen artium* between 1882 and 1886 show that among the 15 first female students, one got the mark “Excellent” (6.5%), 13 got the mention “Very good” (87%) and one got “Good” (6.5%). For the year 1885, 5.6% of the male students got the mark “Excellent”, 54.6% got “Very good”, 32.8% got “Good” and 7% got an inferior mark, *Kvinnelige studenter 1882-1931: en statistisk oversikt – Tabel nr. 6*, in Norske Kvinnelige Akademikeres Landsforbund, *Kvinnelige studenter* cit., p. 18.
- <sup>46</sup> Blom, *Uden dog at overskride sin naturlige begrænsning* cit., p. 83.
- <sup>47</sup> Id., *Modernity and the Norwegian Women’s movement from the 1880s to 1914: changes and continuities*, in S. Paletschek, B. Pietrow-Ennker (eds.), *Women’s emancipation movements in the nineteenth century*, Stanford 2004, p. 146.
- <sup>48</sup> *Studenterne fra 1883: Fest- og Minneskrift til 50-årsjubileet*, Oslo 1933, p. 41.
- <sup>49</sup> I.E. Haavet, *Kjønnede dannelsesbegrep og akademisk motstand – Pionerkvinner i Akademia og det akademiske kulturfeltet*, in Sangolt (ed.), *Minervas døtre* cit., pp. 116-117.
- <sup>50</sup> In 1876, the Danish professor of literature Georg Brandes held a lecture series for Norwegian students about the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard. He defended a conception of literature that no longer ignored social issues and biological factors: gender roles, atheism, marriage, private property were also legitimate themes of literature in his view. The introduction of this new literature in Norway, influenced by political radicalism, Darwinism and positivism, was the beginning of a strong reaction against Romanticism, known as the *Modern Breakthrough*. As a consequence, social and political discussions reached a climax hitherto unknown in the DNS.
- <sup>51</sup> Wallem, *Det norske studentersamfundet gennem hundrede aar* cit., p. 805.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 806.
- <sup>53</sup> Ida Cecilie Krog cit., p. 2.
- <sup>54</sup> Haavet, *Kjønnede dannelsesbegrep og akademisk motstand* cit., pp. 116-117.
- <sup>55</sup> *Skuld* was the name of this club, in a clear reference to the Nordic mythology: it was the name of a Norn, one of the three goddesses in charge of human faith. *Skuld* was the Norn of the Future. She was also depicted as a Valkyrie in the poetic Edda.
- <sup>56</sup> F. Hagerup, *Om Kvindesagen: Stenografisk referat af et Foredrag bestemt til at inlede en Diskussion I DNS Lørdag den 12te oktober 1884*, Christiania 1884, p. 18.
- <sup>57</sup> All the members of *Skuld* had founded the Norwegian Feminist Association [*Norsk Kvindesagsforening*] in June 1884 under the leadership of Gina Krog and Hagbart Emmanuel Berner. According to Gina Krog, the main goal of this association was the right of suffrage, as proclaimed in a speech made in 1885, in G. Krog, *Stemmerett for kvinder: Foredrag I Norsk kvindesags-forening den 27de november 1885*, Christiania 1885, p. 3.
- <sup>58</sup> Marie Holst, who passed the *examen artium* in 1885, wrote: “We did it [foundation of *Skuld*] to learn how to speak and to participate in debates, because it was almost unheard of that ladies should raise their voices in discussions”. In *Den gang*, Norske Kvinnelige Akademikeres Landsforbund, *Kvinnelige studenter* cit., p. 141.
- <sup>59</sup> Blom, *Modernity and the Norwegian Women’s* cit., p. 131.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- <sup>61</sup> For an account of this problem, see Id., *Tanker om frihet i norsk historiografi omkring 1900*, in H. Gustafsson, F. Persson, C. Tornbjør, A. Wallestte (eds.), *Den Dubbla Blicken: Historia i de nordiska samhällena Den Dubbla blicken: historia i de nordiska samhällena*, Lund 2007, pp. 97-118.
- <sup>62</sup> “All the civilized countries in the nineteenth century have experienced an increasingly marked and clear tendency to give women a legal status more similar to men’s, as well as a tendency to improve their social position. This evolution is no less interesting to observe in our country, where a national revival has happened at the same time...”, in Krog, *Norske Kvinders retslige og sociale stilling* cit., p. VII.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> This expression is the title of a book about 19th-century Norway, Ø. Sørensen, *Norsk idéhistorie. Kampen om Norges sjel*, vol. 3, Oslo 2001, p. 444.

<sup>65</sup> Louise Gram Qvam (født 4. mars 1866), in *Studenterne fra 1885: biografiske meddelelser samlet i anledning av deres 25-aars Studentejubilæum*, Christiania 1910, p. 230. The Norwegian flag traditionally bore a mark symbolizing Union with Sweden. The "pure flag" referred to the Norwegian flag without any symbol for Union with Sweden.

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